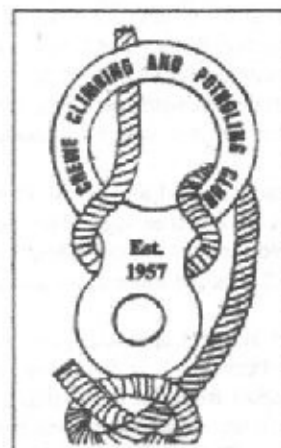


C.C.P.C. Newsletter Aug. '99 No.62



This is more of a news-sheet than a newsletter in order to keep you all up to date with what's going on over the summer. The "proper" newsletter will come out in the late autumn and will be full of all the articles you will have submitted telling us about your exploits and discoveries. By the time I get back from the Karakorum the Pooles Cavern dig will no doubt have linked up with Axe Hole and the Knotlow/Hillocks/Wharf system will no doubt require re-surveying!! Maybe our secret weapon (M.R.1) will also have pushed "Rob's dig". In reality, have a good holiday while I'm slaving away trying to earn a crust (underpaid) in appalling conditions. Ralph.

Welsh Hospitality

I was relieved to hear from Jeff, the South Wales access officer that he was going to watch the Welsh Rugby International on the Saturday afternoon. This meant that he would have to go to the Pub that night to celebrate the inevitable victory. The outcome of this was that instead of meeting at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning to let us in to Craig a Ffynnon, a time nearer eleven would be preferred. This of course meant that we did not have to set off at quite such a silly hour the next morning. As it was, 7a.m. saw Ric, Gareth, Gideon and I on the way to Junction 17 on the M6 to pick up Paul.

Soon we were on the way South. It was a cracking day, cold crisp and bright sunshine with not a cloud to be seen. An ideal day for going underground in fact!! We had a pleasant journey down, with spectacular views, although Ric missed the lot as he can sleep anywhere.

Time for breakfast on the way, as I discover that Land Rovers are not designed for Rally Sports. i.e. 60 mph right hand turns into the car park. Anyway it woke everybody up including even Ric. Full English breakfast for £3.50 with free sauce and fag ash. Gareth was not impressed with the standard of cuisine but he did agree that the cafe on this side of the dual carriageway was a substantial improvement on the one on the other side of the road where we dined the last time we were down this way. By 10.30 a.m. we were changed and waiting for Jeff. On the advice of Paul I left my car in a nearby Pub car park as apparently the Landlord was caver friendly. By 11.15 we were getting worried as there was no sign of Jeff but he then appeared on his trusty push bike, apparently large volumes of ale had had to be downed the night before in sympathy as Wales had lost again.

Off to the entrance and concern was expressed by some that I would not even get through the access gate which was indeed quite small. I was silently more worried about what the Guide Book said was a 10 inch high bedding plane crawl and duck in the entrance series which was usually 4-6 inches deep in water. As we were to discover later my guide book is out of date. The crawl has now been excavated to about 3 feet but it soon became clear that the South Wales definition of a flat out crawl is not the same as a Derbyshire definition. Either that or my current dieting programme is being more successful than I thought.

A couple of climbs and a very interesting boulder choke brought us to the Hall of the Mountain King a superb linear chamber about 20 ft high. It was full of incredible sights, the ceiling had loads of straws up to 2-3 metre long whilst the floor contained fantastic gour pools. At the end the chamber branched and in the roof at this point there was a marvellous wall of flow stone under which lay the largest calcite bosses I have ever seen. Well worth the effort of driving down we all said.

Right which way now? The Guide Book said a low down crawl on the right of about 800 ft leads to the next chamber. Gareth and Ric reconnoitre the left hand branch but say they cannot see a way on. Up the right hand branch then, where we see an opening on the right low down, this must be it. Off we go, grovel, grovel, a small but sandy passage which only occasionally allowed progress on hands and knees. Then an interesting tight bit (for me at least) then at last we can stand up only to be faced with a narrow "V" shape rift which looked interesting. The others squeeze though vertically, but I am worried about slipping down the rift and getting stuck. Brainwave! get Gareth to lie in the bottom of the rift so that Gideon and I can go through horizontally. Great for me and Gid but not so great for Gareth. This means though that I am in front so off we go through the next bit of the crawl, round a bend, through a squeeze, round another bend, but what's this, someone's dig: Bl...y h..l we have gone the wrong way! Three quarters of an hour crawling on our stomachs and we have gone the wrong way. No-one believes me at first so Paul checks the dig out as well. Then it is back through the rift with mark 2 protection this time i.e. put both Gareth and Ric in the bottom to make the traverse even easier, then back down the crawl to where we came from.

This time Paul and I look down the left hand branch only to discover the way on is indeed a low down crawl on the right. Gideon and I have had enough of the flat out bits by this time so we opt for a picnic and a look at the scenery while the other shoot up the crawl. We then set off out while others spent about 2 hours exploring the next section of the cave, discovering as they do so that the boulder chokes get more loose and more dangerous the further you are from the entrance.

We all meet up back at the entrance before trooping back to the car, just as it is going dark. Great the pub is open, so I dive in to test the beer first. At the bar is sat the landlord, his wife, the cook and the waitress. Having order a shandy I start to peruse the menu amid jokes from the ladies that they will have to turn the chip pan back on etc. Gideon joins me and we go to sit down taking the menu with us. It is at this point the landlord comes over and says "Sorry lads but we don't do meals on Sunday night." "Can't you do anything?" I ask. "No the staff have finished for the night now" came the reply.

It was also apparent that the staff had been busy knocking back the Brandy and Babycham for some time as this conversation was greeted with considerable giggling from the bar. Just then the others came in. Having heard the news, there was much gnashing of teeth and comments like "we will have to make do with a Big Mac on the way home" at which point the ice began to thaw as the cook realised we had a long journey back to England and she said it was poor hospitality to foreigners if they didn't feed us!

Having got the staff to pity our plight, the Landlord's commercial brain kicked in as he realised the profit to be made from feeding five hungry people. He scuttled over to our table with the lunchtime menu to choose from. To make it easy for the staff we all chose tomato soup and a main course of roast beef. These were duly served amid much surprise from the Landlord that the cook could even prepare the food in her intoxicated state never mind carry it to the table without dropping it. The food was absolutely delicious and was finished off with large pieces of chocolate cake and apple pie etc. All for the sum of £6.95 - not bad eh?!

Fully fed and watered we were ready to set off home. We all expressed our appreciation to the staff for helping us out and the landlord gave us his telephone number so we could call him in advance should we want feeding on a Sunday in the future. Outside the pub we all agreed we had been the beneficiaries of excellent Welsh hospitality.

John Martin

Hillocks Engine Shaft.

As you probably know negotiations are well under way to open up the old Hillocks engine shaft. Steve initiated this and began discussions with the farmer. Ralph and Nigel had a site meeting with English Nature (who were co-operative) and Mark Lowe of DCA. Steve and Paul investigated the shaft (on a very short rope-but that's another story!) and the diagrams they produced were sent to DCC (Mines Tips and Quarries) who were not only co-operative but hinted that they might cap the shaft for us with CCPC fitting an access lid. Paul Nixon already has this under way.

Eldon Hole.

Many of you attended this recent "day out" which included a camp at Over Haddon organised by Paul H. We replaced the stakes in North gully, put a new one in South gully, replaced the rusty rawl bolts in South gully and removed the rusty old fence surrounding the hole. Plans are afoot to replace the remaining fence that is no longer stock-proof. Mark Lowe (DCA and DUG) has managed to acquire most of the materials but we will be looking for labourers in the near future. It should provide the opportunity for some of you semi-retired members to come out and have a pleasant social day without even getting wet (unless it's raining!)



Meets '99.

8 Aug Lathkill Head (top to be confirmed (access))
29 Aug DCRO street collection/social weekend.
25 Sept DCRO Stomp
3 Oct Tearsall Pipe (Brightgate)
16 Oct Notts Pot
6 Nov Ogof Draenen
27 Nov Long Rake

21 Aug Grange Rig/Xmas (exchange)
4 Sept Milwr Tunnel (provisional, 12 places)
26 Sept Penyghent/Little Hull
10 Oct Peak Cavern (White River?)
31 Oct DCRO Whitehall (Training-all welcome)
13 Nov Rumbling Hole
5 Dec Top Sink/Pool Sink

JH Mine Call-out

An article about JH. Errm, well it's a big trip with lots of rope and not much space to use it then an impressively large hole in the limestone once you've squirmed through the far reaches of Peak Cavern. However the bit you're presumably reading this for is to try and understand why it took us until after midnight to get out. Perhaps it's worth noting that it would have been pretty late before we got out anyway a big trip with large numbers of people - loved ones were made to promise they wouldn't worry until much later than normal, and housemates were made to understand I hadn't eloped with any of the club. Even so, midnight is quite a few hours later than we were expecting to surface. The reason follows, but bear with me - the explanation's not that complicated, just my way of explaining things!

With four of us (Rob, Steve Evans, Paul N. and myself) elected to de-rig, and four large tackle bags of rope to drag out (plus the entrance pitch, plus our personal gear), we went for the obvious conclusion of a bag each. I de-rigged the bottom pitch and took the bag past Rob who was to de-rig the next phase. On reaching the ledge near the bottom of Leviathan, I tied my bag into a loop at the bottom of the vertical section of rope as an aid to prusiking, intending to haul the bag up from the top before de-rigging the top of the pitch. Rob agreed with this idea, and I set off for the workshop. When I reached the top of Leviathan I met Paul who had de-rigged the alternative route down to the ledge and had come back to check we were getting on OK. We decided that time was now of the essence to avoid an overdue party and subsequent rescue call out - it was getting close to our estimated surface time and we were all still a very long way from the surface. It was agreed Paul and Steve would de-rig the remainder of our ropes up to the surface shaft (two bags), and Rob and I would finish de-rigging Leviathan - we could still surface using Dave ('Moose') Nixon's permanently ropes, towing our own two bags behind us. A fine plan and we should have been out in no time. Steve and Paul went off ahead and I waited at the top of a very cold Leviathan for Rob. No sooner had Paul got out of hearing range, Rob reached and passed my tackle sack on the ledge. Shortly after this there was an EXTREMELY loud thud, followed by an increase in my heart rate, this only returned to normal after an even louder obscenity was shouted up the shaft a few seconds later - if he can still swear at me then he's probably not too injured. For those of you who don't know JH, Leviathan is big and wet, so communication wasn't the easiest thing between the two of us. We established Rob was uninjured there was nothing I could do and I was to wait at the top of the shaft. It wasn't until he arrived at the very top of the pitch, and had got at least enough of his breath back to utter syllables that I discovered in the process of tying on his own bag at the bottom of the shaft and rearranging mine that his bag had made a leap for freedom not only back to the ledge, but to the floor of Leviathan. He was therefore forced to reverse prusik back to the ledge, undo the knots in the rope and re-hang it the direct route down the shaft, then change over to abseil and retrieve the bag. He hauled the bag back to the ledge, presumably gave the straps a good kicking, and SECURELY tied it to a knot in the rope. Eventually he was able to set off slowly back up the shaft. Paul by this stage had decided the top of Bitch Pitch (where he was sitting waiting for us) was far too cold and he dropped down Dave Nixon's ropes expecting to find us coming the other way. Needless to say he was more than a little surprised to see I hadn't moved in all the time it had taken Steve and him to de-rig the ropes above us. Once asserting we were in fact almost done, he set off with word we were OK, knowing that we would follow him shortly. By the time Rob had arrived at the top of the pitch he was sufficiently knacked as to be unable to help me haul the bags - at least not without a rest first whilst I came up with a damn fine low friction and mechanically advantaged hauling system (given little more than our own SRT gear plus a deviation and another set of ropes to get in the way - the Tiblocs have been purchased and the pulley is on the shopping list!). After this rest we swapped to a direct haul anyway! By this stage Rob's lamp had failed, so whilst I unscrewed the last few maillons he swapped to his spare (our last) and we untangled the rope sufficiently to persuade it into a tackle sack before at long last making our way to the surface. At the very aptly named Bitch Pitch Rob's spare lamp failed - it obviously hadn't taken too kindly to being dropped down a pitch

an hour or so before. This left me at the top of Bitch Pitch waving Paul onto the surface to reassure Steve and the rest of the world that we were still alive, and Rob passing the most evil of bolt changes and deviations in near darkness. Paul and I of course had no idea that Rob was in the dark at this stage, and assumed quite rightly (for the third time that day) we were only shortly behind him. Anyone who's been in JH will recall the "interesting" cartgate (which makes even the boulder choke in Pooles cavern look stable) and the care that has to be taken to pass certain holes in the "floor" and avoid so much as breathing under sections of the "roof". Now imagine there's two of you, with one light and a very heavy tackle sack each. Don't forget to add that you've been caving at least twelve hours. At the same time try to consider Paul's state of mind. After a few minutes chatting to Steve on the surface he decides to walk back to his car, get changed and then return to help carry the bags back to the cars (ten bags including our personal gear, four people to carry them). He is somewhat surprised (you'd think he'd be getting used to our disappearing acts by now!) when, once again, we appear to have made no progress along a half hour (absolute maximum) walk despite being right behind him when he set off on it around two hours ago. Conceivably he could have gone back to us once more, but by this stage there is little he or Steve can do on their own - with very little of their own light left and being in far from the best condition in which to mount a rescue if there was a problem. Given that this was beginning to look more and more likely they decided to call for outside help. Of course no sooner had Dave Edwards made it to the top of the shaft than Rob and I had made it to the bottom, and the rescue was called off. We surfaced eventually and our combined might of six (now that "Whacker" had joined us - he is now considering buying a mobile 'phone so that he too could have known it was all off!) just about managed to haul the ropes to the grass and back to the farm track. Coffee all round (thanks once again to the absence of "Whacker's" phone) and we managed to get changed. Thanks are definitely due not only to Dave Edwards and Whacker, but to all those who got involved in the rescue but got stopped before making it to the farm. The overall opinion was that it was better to make the callout then than to risk making it a few hours later with a much more serious situation, but if anyone taped "The Vicar of Dibley" that evening, then there are one or two DCRO members would like to borrow it please!

Obviously prussiking up Leviathan with the bags would have avoided dropping one of them in the first place, but one noted, and time consuming, complication was the need to reverse prussik the pitch - given the load on the rope below it would have been impossible to abseil or even make the changeover. For this reason I no longer intend, nor can it be recommended, to leave tackle sacks to be hauled from above as an aid to prussiking - the added complications should there be a difficulty mid-rope would seem to make the practice unworthwhile.

Matthew.

DCRO Street Collection.

Some time ago I applied to DCC to hold a street collection in Castleton on EITHER 28.29 or 30 Aug. They gave permission for all three!! Needles to say the usual "Buxton" based volunteers are having problems manning all three days and in fit of madness exacerbated by alcohol CCPC volunteered to do the Sunday. The idea is to make a weekend of it by camping at either Pindale or Rowter (to be decided at the Aug meeting.) Please do your best to attend. A good turn out means that we'll only need to do a short stint each. Why not bring the family? Especially if they can rattle a tin!! PLEASE DO YOUR BEST TO ATTEND. Ralph.



Pooles Cavern.

You are probably aware that the dig at the end of Pooles Cavern continues to progress well. All sorts of new ideas (Plug and Feathers, Hilti Caps, MR1) have been tried with varying amounts of success. If you fancy an evening out that's not too strenuous (or tight-depending on where you get to!) why not pop along and have a look. It is advisable to ring Ross or Nigel first.